Effects of pre-task planning time on paired oral test performance

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Research Background

Effects of Pre-Task Planning

- Learners can prepare for what to speak during planning time → they can prioritise meaning while retaining focus on form on-task.
- Planning time helps to control the level of cognitive demand imposed by potentially unfamiliar topics → establishing a fair environment for test takers

Previous Studies

I. **Inconsistent results** about pre-task planning effects between task-based and test-based research

II. **A lack** of pre-task planning studies using dialogic tasks

I. Pre-task planning in task-based research

- Pre-task planning tends to be beneficial in classroom or laboratory contexts.
- Effects of pre-task planning on fluency
- Limited effects of pre-task planning on complexity and accuracy

Pre-task planning in testing research

- Effects of pre-task planning are mixed and limited in testing contexts
  - Some benefits in Tavakoli & Skehan (2005); Wigglesworth (1997); Xi (2005).
  - Limited or no effects in Elder & Iwashita (2005); Wigglesworth (2001); Wigglesworth & Elder (2010)

II. Monologic or dialogic tasks?

TBLT

- Mostly monologic tasks (e.g., Crookes, 1989, Ortega, 1999, Mehnert, 1998)
- Some studies using dialogic tasks (e.g., Foster & Skehan, 1996, 1999)

Testing

- All monologic types of task

Measuring 'Interactional Competence' in paired and group tests

- Paired and group tests can elicit richer language functions and are suitable for assessing candidates' interactional competence.
- Popular use of dialogic tasks in standardised tests:

  e.g. Cambridge ESOL Main Suite Examinations,

  University entrance examinations in China

  and Hong Kong.

→ Need for examining the impact of pre-task planning before dialogic tasks

Multifaceted Approach

- Traditional summative view: Linear relationship between planning and L2 performance
- Leaners' performance may change during the performance?

→Need for process-oriented approach, as well as summative approach

Research Questions

RQ1: Does pre-task planning affect test-takers' performance in paired oral interactions as measured by rating scores?

RQ2: Does pre-task planning affect test-takers' performance as measured by discourse analytic measures?

RQ3: How do test-takers co-construct paired oral performance under planned and unplanned conditions?

Research Methods

Participants

- 32 EFL learners at a Japanese university (16 pairs)
- **Proficiency:** TOEFL PBT Mean=476, around B1 (CEFR)
- **Pairing:** Test-taker variables controlled (e.g. age, L1, educational background, prof level, gender, acquaintanceship)

Planning

- **Planned:** 3 minutes of pre-task planning time
- **Unplanned:** no planning time

Task

- Decision-making tasks: Part 3 of the Cambridge FCE
- "Happiness Task", "Café Task", "Profession Task" and "Tourists Task"
- Two tasks in the same pair
- 5 minutes

Happiness task (5 minutes)

Here are some of the things in life which can affect our happiness.

1. Talk to each other about how **important** these things are for a happy life.
2. Decide which two are the most **important**.







1. Rating

- Rating scale (modified from Iwashita, Elder & McNamara, 2001)
- Criteria: Fluency, Complexity, Accuracy (Level: 0-10)
- Two raters with 1.5-hour rater standardisation training

2. Discourse analytic measures

- **Fluency:**
  - Speed: N of words / second
  - Breakdown: N of lexicalised, unlexicalised pauses / speaking time
  - Repair: N of repetitions, corrections / N of words
- **Complexity:**
  - Syntactic: N of Clauses / AS-unit
  - Lexical: Lexical diversity (MTLD)
- **Accuracy:** N of errors / 100 words
- **Interaction:** N of words / turn

3. Conversation analysis

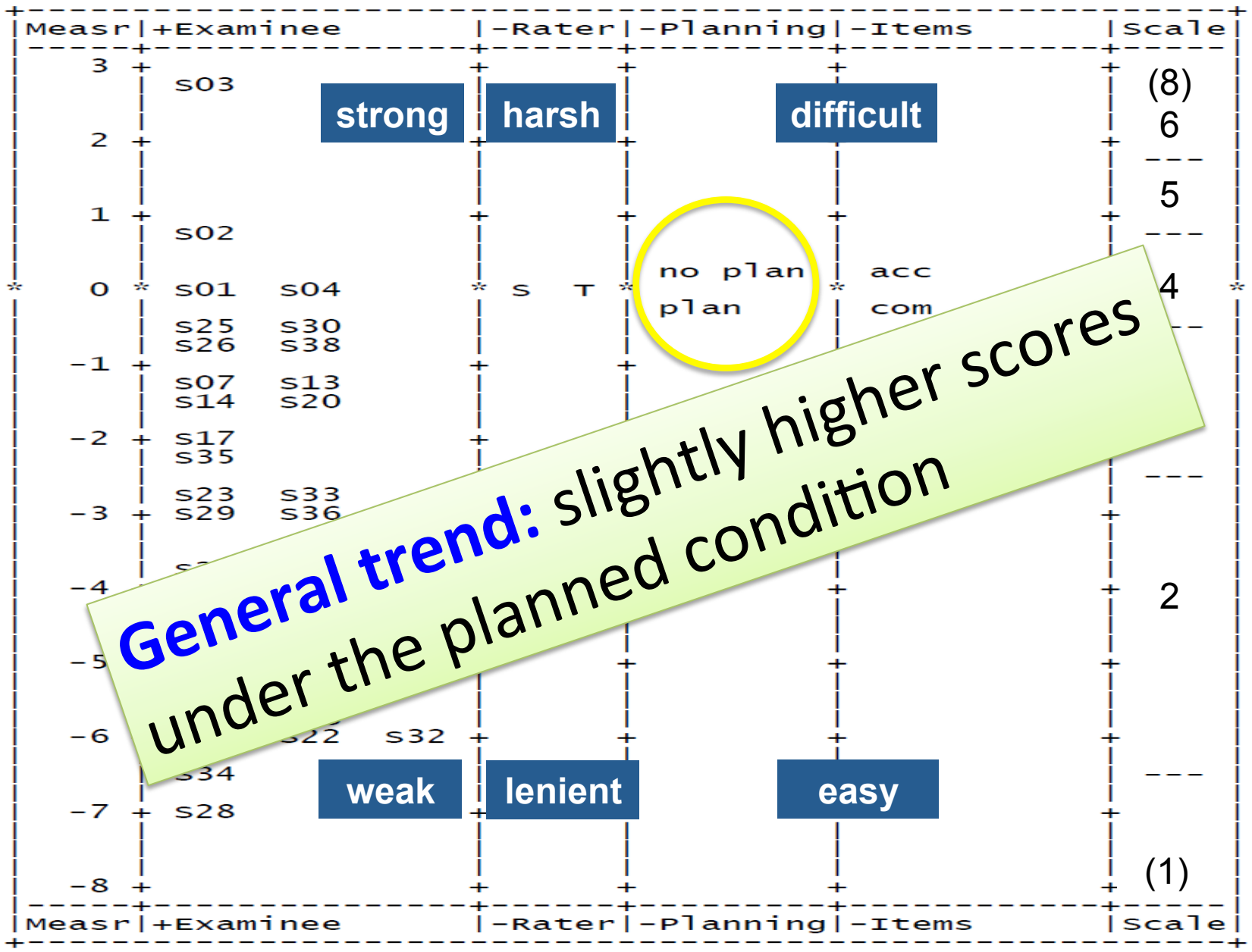
- To interpret and elaborate on the findings of the statistical analysis of scores and discourse analytic measures
- Global patterns for paired interactions (Galaczi, 2008)
  1. Collaborative pattern
  2. Parallel pattern
  3. Asymmetric pattern

Results

1. Score analysis
2. Discourse measure analysis
3. Conversation analysis

1. Rating Scores

FACET map



Impact of planning on each rating category

Fluency	Fair -M Average	Measure (difficulty)	Infit MnSq	Sig
Planned	2.90	-0.70	0.79	Fixed (all same) chi-square: 17.7 Significance: 0.00
Unplanned	2.46	0.70	1.16	

Complexity	Fair -M Average	Measure (difficulty)	Infit
Planned	2.46		
Unplanned			

			Infit MnSq	Non Sig
Pla		-0.31	0.94	Fixed (all same) chi-square: 4.0 Significance: 0.05
Unp	2.18	0.31	0.94	

For **fluency** and **complexity**, planning made a significant difference to scores.
But the raw score differences were small.

2. Discourse analytic measures

Fluency

- **Speed fluency:** quicker speech under the unplanned
- **Breakdown fluency:** more breakdowns un ndition

Accuracy & Lexical and Syntactic Co

- No sig difference

Interaction

- Lon

Planning made a significant difference to discourse analytic measures for **Fluency** and **Interaction**.

	Planned Mean	Unplanned Mean	t	sig
Speed flue words/second	1.14	1.34	-0.093	0.000
Breakdown fluency: Length of pauses/ second	0.63	0.72	-0.202	0.000
Interaction: N of words/turn	10.02	7.97	2.743	0.010

3. Conversation analysis

a. Collaborative interaction under the unplanned condition

b. Parallel and asymmetric interaction under the planned condition

- Typical interaction - Pair 1 (S01&S02): beginning, middle, end

Unplanned: Frequent short turn exchanges at beginning

Excerpt (1) Task: Happiness

1 S02: What is:: important thing, do you think?

2 S01: I think (1.0) this one ((pointing out the photo)), talking with friends is

3 S02: Uh

4 S01: the most important (1.0) to be happiness, I think

5 S02: OK. Why do you think so?

Short turns. Frequent turn exchanges. Frequent pauses.

Unplanned: Gradual co-construction in middle

Excerpt (2) Task: Happiness

1 S01: Uh I think house is not impo(h)rtant for me.

2 S02: Oh really?

3 S01: Yes

4 S02: Why do you think so?

5 S01: Because (.) now ah I live in really (.) poor hou(h)se huh huh but I feel much happiness happy,

6 S02: uh

7 S01: so I think this is not important for me.

8 S02: Yeah, I didn't also comment uh:: (1.0) if we don't have good house, uh: maybe ok, because if we have good friends

9 S01: Yes yes that's right.

Short turns. Fast speech.

Unplanned: Further collaboration at end

Excerpt (3) Task: Happiness

1 S01: I think (4.0) va- vacation is good for me [because (1.0)

2 S02: [Uh uh

3 S01: It's it's really fu(h)n and I can get good experience and (2.0) uh

4 S02: Uh that's right. I think that vacation connected to: this picture=
((showing the picture of *friends* to S01))

5 S01: =A[h yes.

6 S02: [because if we have friend, we can go: (1.0) uh this this place,
ah (.5) a:s sightseeing with friends

7 S01: Uh

8 S02: So I think uh:: friends is very very important thing, the best thing

9 S01: <I ((nodding)) totally agree with you.> uh but if you (.) we want to go
to sta- ah vacation, we: need money,

Animated, collaborative interaction.

Planned: Productive start

Excerpt (4) Task: Profession

1 S01: Which jobs (1.0) is the most difficult?

2 S02: Uh:: most difficult uh:: I think all picture: have of course uh:: difficulties yeah, but the most difficult (.) job for me (.5) is %I think% this picture (1.0) ((pointing at the *painter* picture)) is so difficult (.5) to get to the top.

3 S01: Why do you think so?

4 S02: Ah .hh (.5) I think uh (4.0) the first is uh: (.5) many people can buy this picture or not, this is the uh (.5) the most difficult thing. (1.0) Maybe before before the person buy the picture, this person is so poor.

5 S01: Uh[:

6 S02: [Uh So this is so difficult job. How about you?

Presenting individually what they prepared.
Long turns. Slow speech. Parallel interaction.

Planned: Stagnant middle

Excerpt (5) Task: Profession

1 S02: Then how about business man?
2 S01: Business man
3 (2.5)
4 S02: Compared to the other pictures, this is not difficult to get to the top.
5 (.5)
6 S01: Uh
7 (1.5)
8 S01: If you wan- if you want to be: (.5) business man, do you need talent?
9 S02: uh
10 (.5)
11 S02: Uh:: (.5) we need effort

Running out of ideas.

Planned: Asymmetrical end

Excerpt (6) Task: Profession

1 **S02:** Ah I also (1.5) doctor is (.5) not difficult to get to the top, because (.5) there are a lot of sick people. If there are many sick people, they ca(h)n wo(h)rk.

2 S01: Ye(h)s they (2.0) need (.) need money, I thi(h)nk and intelligence

3 **S02:** ah ah and we often need doctor (1.0) we need sports player because many people like sports, and we need singer. We often listen to the music

4 S01: Uh huh

5 **S02:** but this picture, some people need picture,

6 S01: Uh

7 **S02:** but in my opinion, we don't need picture. (.5) yeah so this is so difficult to get to the top

S02: dominant – S01: passive: limited collaboration in topic development

Conclusion

Main Findings

- **Score analysis:** Planning slightly upgraded speech in terms of fluency and complexity
- **Discourse measure analysis:** Planning improved breakdown fluency and turn length, but was detrimental to speed fluency
- **Conversation analysis:**

[Unplanned] shorter turns, quicker turn exchanges → developing interaction collaboratively

[Planned] longer turns, parallel interaction → falling into a stagnant period → asymmetric interaction

Multifaceted approach→ Complex relationship between pre-task planning and performance

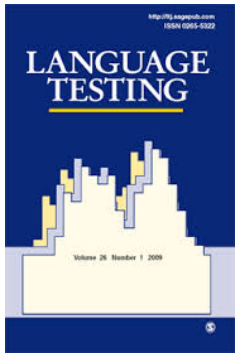
- Planning conditions affect **the mode of discourse** in paired tests
  - **Unplanned: dialogues** (i.e. collaboratively approaching the task, incorporating partners' ideas into their own speech)
  - **Planned:** a series of **monologues** (i.e. concentrating on delivering what they prepared)

Planning functions against tapping into the construct that paired tests should actually be measuring → **planning might deprive candidates of the chance to demonstrate their abilities to interact collaboratively**.

Implementing pre-task planning prior to paired tests is NOT advisable.

Thank you!

Nitta, R. and Nakatsuhara, F. (in press) 'A multifaceted approach to investigating pre-task planning effects on paired oral test performance' *Language Testing.*



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